

study Foreign Languages is high enough to justify the employment of staff. To the extent that a university succeeds in imposing certain Foreign Languages on the school curriculum (e.g., French, German) and in retaining its authority to examine students on these languages, it provides a point of continuous academic organization — susceptible of routinization — for those schools which can recruit a sufficient number of language students. In Australia, it is above all the private schools which meet this requirement, thanks to the cultural characteristics of their intake and the gender segmentation of the academic market. Thus, on a national level, 42.8% of private non-Catholic schools teach French (as against 16.7% of Catholic schools and 13.8% of public schools); German is taught in 32.4% of private non-Catholic schools, but in only 5.3% of Catholic schools and 10.1% of public schools; the figures for Latin are, respectively, 13.4%, 1.1% and 0.9%¹⁰.

In this exchange, what the private schools receive is a legitimate curriculum which defines their specialized competence and establishes their market role. This curriculum answers, in a global fashion, the status needs of their clients, that is, the joint satisfaction of academic and moral security, the provision of intellectual, ethical and aesthetic training in a socially filtered environment. What the university receives is a flow of students whose apparently objective measured distance from the rest of the school population is the basis of the university's relative prestige and of its authority over student selection¹¹.

The Foreign Languages example involves curriculum specialization on a narrow social base. If Foreign Languages are studied by 16% of Year 11 students, many of these languages are not the legitimate languages consecrated by the universities as truly scholastic. On the contrary, only 4% of students take French and 1.8% German. However, the exchange relationship between universities and private schools can be illustrated equally well from specialization on a broad base.

Physics and Economics are subjects which much larger numbers of students take in Year 11 (22.5% and 16.5% respectively). As success in these subjects does not depend to the same degree as the Arts curriculum on literary or verbal accomplishment, as the learning criteria can be methodically enunciated, and as both occupy an important place in professional or managerial training, these subjects lack the qualities of exclusiveness which make Foreign Languages (especially the most consecrated ones) so important for private schools. At the same time, the fine grain assessment, the methodical organization and theoretical qualities of

these subjects make intense competition possible within a framework of exactly scaled performances and of tests whose overall level of difficulty can be pre-set to fail as many as half the candidates. It is precisely these subjects which offer the most favourable terrain for utilizing the high resources, selective intake and technical routinization of private schools. Moreover, these subjects are often taken together with other relatively specialized subjects which also lend themselves to methodical discrimination, e.g., Chemistry and Mathematics. This drives up the total effort required to obtain a place in University through the proliferation of exact academic requirements on which selection is based.

"The intellectual behaviours demanded by academic success are in themselves culturally selective."

The university benefits even more from this exchange relationship than in the case of Foreign Languages. For with Physics and Economics (though to different degrees), the connection between scholastic attainment and the status culture of middle and upper middle class families is less overt. The mathematically-based physical and social sciences present a culturally neutral aspect, reinforced by assessment techniques, such as multiple choice tests, where content is narrower and the internal reliability and homogeneity of test items is measurable. The scholastic environment represented by these tests, just because it is devoid of the more direct tests of social origin which the literary-based curriculum displays, can attract the most intense investment of private resources — from pre-natal enrolment of children in private schools to coaching colleges, summer schools, grade repeating and private tuition — and the most methodical application of these resources. It is also an environment which, because of its apparent objectivity and indifference to social influences, will be resolutely defended as the only path to academic justice which the school system can provide. The university administrator, faced with the paradox that this path is occupied so disproportionately by private school students, ends up declaring it a mystery — "It appears that there are unknown factors in the advantages gained by the independent schools that are not fully accounted for and may not even be related at all to any general trend in the social composition of students qualifying for entry."¹²

These exchange relationships form

what we have described as the micro-ecology of universities and private schools. Like the eco-systems of the natural world, this system relies on the reciprocal action of the different organisms and their joint adaptation to the wider environment in which they are located and from which they shelter each other. But could it not be said that the very cultural completeness of these educational institutions — the very intensity of the transactions between them and the dependence that this implies — impedes and distorts not only their own development, but the growth and vitality of the education system as a whole?¹³

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8. "Undergraduate Entrance Requirements and Selection for 1988 and Beyond", Document of the Selection Procedures Committee of the Academic Board of the University of Melbourne (June 1985). The figures reported in the present study are from the SCOPE survey of the Victorian post-compulsory school population in 1984. The sample comprised 76.3% of this population. Only figures for public high schools and private non-Catholic schools are reported here. The respective subsamples are public schools (boys) 8169 and private non-Catholic schools (boys) 2655, and public schools (girls) 11,866 and private non-Catholic schools (girls) 2909.

9. "The freedom allowed to the educational system is the best guarantee that it will serve the perpetuation of the relations between the classes", Bourdieu & Passeron, *op.cit.*, p.126.
10. Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Quality and Equality*, Canberra, 1985, pp.128-129. If secondary schools only are considered, there is much greater equality, which proves how important are the great private establishments — both Catholic and non-Catholic — which offer education over both primary and secondary levels.

11. The preference by the University of Melbourne for the most culturally consecrated languages in Australia (French, German, Latin) over the community languages of migrant groups (Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Polish) recalls the observation by Bourdieu that "of all the objects offered to the consumers' choice, none are more classifying than the works of legitimate art, which, globally distinctive, permit the production of an infinity of distinctions through play on divisions and sub-divisions by type, epoch, style, author,

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Selection into higher education

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The Federation of Australian University Staff Associations, Federation of College Academics, and the Australian Teachers' Federation share a common commitment to an increase in the quantity of participation in higher education and a broadening of access, by which is meant a more equal distribution of higher education places between social groups. They also agree that an expansion in the number of places should be accompanied by adequate public financing, so that growth does not occur through the super-exploitation of those working in higher education and at the expense of the quality and the breadth of the education received by each student.

1. Importance of socio-economic composition of higher education

The socio-economic composition of higher education has become more equal since the abolition of tuition fees but all the data confirms that it remains markedly skewed in favour of higher income and occupation families. For example, although in 1979 only 14 per cent of the labour force worked in professional occupations, 31 per cent of university students and 19 per cent of CAE students were drawn from families in which the father worked in a professional occupation. While 31 per cent of the overall labour force worked in trades and manual occupations, only 19 per cent of university students and 26 per cent of CAE students came from families in which the father worked in such occupations.¹ Within the universities the high-income earning professions of medicine and law are also the most socially exclusive.

Despite the expansion of higher education since World War 2, despite increased school retention, and despite periodic at-

tempts to implement policies that would encourage greater 'equality of opportunity', distributional changes have been marginal. Existing patterns of privilege are continuously reproduced. The educational system has not been sufficiently reorganised to prevent prior social inequalities from becoming inequalities of educational attainment, and subsequent social inequalities in the distribution of credentials. Notwithstanding the expectations of fairness and upward social mobility created by the 'meritocratic' education system, we still send students into the labour market on terms that are profoundly unequal. This is a source of massive popular disillusionment with public education, a disillusionment that increases in proportion to the competitiveness of the labour market.

Despite their role in formal credentialling, education institutions do not have the power to shape the demand for labour or the sectoral location of new jobs. But reform to education can alter the terms of labour supply. There are two choices — to continue to operate an education system which directly reproduces social inequalities and mirrors the competitive labour market, with its class and gender biases, or to provide all students with the personal development, the knowledge and the credentials that they need. But to achieve the latter involves challenging some of our own deepest preconceptions about the internal structuring of the education system. It is now urgent to formulate and implement policies that will overhaul the socio-economic composition of higher education.

First, the fees debate has made it clear that many people, even in the labour movement, see the present socio-economic inequalities as fixed and inevitable and support the imposition of

fees as a redistributive fiscal measure. Unless there is a solid set of reform proposals that would markedly change the socio-economic composition then this 'left' argument for fees (which nonetheless has its roots in the assumption that higher education is a privilege and a luxury) may carry the day at the next National ALP Conference. A more egalitarian socio-economic composition is necessary to, and consistent with, the maintenance of free public higher education.

Secondly, increased school retention is now placing very great demand pressure on higher education institutions, and this pressure can be expected to increase. The *Quality of Education Review Committee Report* suggest that retention to Year 12 of secondary school (which was 36 per cent in 1982 and 45 per cent in 1984) will rise to 65 per cent by 1992. The Report envisages a rise of 36,000 in the number of Year 11 students and 48,000 in the number of Year 12 students, a total increase of one third in the number of upper secondary students by 1992.²

Traditionally, most of these students would not have aspired to enter higher education. Now an increasing number will do so, but if present entry policies are maintained they are likely to be streamed into a narrower range of pre-vocational training options. This would further undermine taxpayer support for free public higher education.

2. Weakness of past reforms

The 1970s saw a quantitative expansion of higher education, the abolition of fees and the introduction of the TEAS scheme, a new system of Commonwealth schools funding based on the principle (not carried through in full) of equal measured resources for every child and

the introduction of the Disadvantaged Schools Program and other Schools Programs for special groups of students who had traditionally been unsuccessful in the education system. Why was this program of economic reforms unable to produce a much more egalitarian social mix in higher education?

Our stock response has been to point to the various countervailing economic factors: the recession, the popular response to the collapse of the youth labour market, the abolition of teacher scholarships, the decline in the value and availability of TEAS, the deliberate cessation of growth in student numbers via Government directive and the slow increase in school retention rates. While these factors all played an important part they do not take us to the heart of the problem — the limitations of the original reform package.

To grasp the problem of access in a new and effective way involves looking beyond the parameters of the debate between Whitlamism and Fraserism. It also involves rejecting the newer philosophy of deregulation, which is actually a regression to a much more distant past.

The limitations of the Whitlam package were four:

First, it was too narrow. It concentrated on economic reforms to the exclusion of structural changes to the system of selection within and through education. The economic reforms were necessary, and the need for economic reform must still be asserted, but these reforms are not in themselves sufficient to overcome structural barriers.

Secondly, it was meritocratic, and therefore utopian and unachievable. The Whitlam package tried to create a 'fair' competition in education by equalising the material conditions under which students prepared for and entered higher education but the present system of competition for entry was not fair and cannot be fair.

Thirdly then, it left the system of competitive merit-based selection into higher education — which depresses retention rates in upper secondary schools and shapes the student experience all the way back to the beginning of primary school — totally intact and unquestioned.

Fourthly, it refused to recognise that powerful social groups are able to manipulate the education system to their own advantage. Not only did the Whitlam reforms fail to confront the elite private schools, they actually encouraged the consolidation of existing private schools and the formation of new private schools (and new would-be social elites) through 'needs-based' schools funding. While the reform package provided increased resources to disadvantaged schools, it also advanced the interests of the privileged —

and it is the existence of privilege which creates disadvantage.

Two of these structural barriers to reform, the merit-based selection system and the public/private division of schooling, warrant further examination.

3. The selection system

The predominant mode of selection into higher education is via competitive entry through external tests or examinations. The most widespread form of assessment is normative, whereby students are ranked in relation to each other rather than in relation to externally-defined criteria of performance. The fundamental assumption of normative assessment is that any group of students may be spread out along an 'ability' scale ranging from, say, 100 per cent or A to less than 20 per cent or E.¹

The usefulness of such a system for selection purposes is obvious. It appears objective and even scientific, it is cheap and easy to administer and easy to manipulate for specific administrative purposes. Scores can be aggregated, scaled, moderated and adjusted to a predetermined success rate. The dominance of rank ordering as a selection technique is reflected in the reduction of debate to marginal questions about bias in scoring.

However this selection technique indicates a preference for administrative convenience over educational goals and is a primary cause of inequalities in access. A close analysis finds it to be very significantly flawed:

1. It is pseudo-scientific. The notion that a complex construct such as educational achievement — let alone educational potential — can be reduced to a single number is quite preposterous, a 'social science fiction' that confers an apparently scientific veneer on the process of socially based (and socially-biased) selection. The idea of a spread of ability groupings — groupings that are in any case usually a surrogate ordering on the basis of social position — is a hangover from the old nineteenth century assumption that intelligence is a function of the physical size of the brain or a particular arrangement of the brain cells, and denies the almost infinite educability of human beings through the process of active learning.
2. It is spurious. Examinations do not measure a fixed quantity of ability or merit, but artificially 'freeze' a moving target, like a photograph. If one HSC student has reached 70 per cent today that tells us little about what she or he can achieve tomorrow. If one HSC student has moved from 50 per cent to 75 per cent in six months and another has moved from 75 per cent to 78 per cent in the same time, it is at least arguable

that the former is more likely to improve in the future, but the latter is more likely to be selected.

1982 research by Terry Dunn at the University of Melbourne showed that students from public schools consistently achieved higher in first year university courses than students from private schools when both groups had the same entry score.⁴

This is not to say that examination-based scores do not have their place as modest educational tools, merely to say that they are highly undesirable when used as selection devices to place practical limits on a student's future development.

The tragedy is that students internalise the message of selection scores and thereby place limits on their own potential. The presence of illiterate and innumerate students in middle secondary education at least partly owes itself to the persistent use of normative testing and ability groupings in many primary schools. Normative testing produces large-scale failure automatically.

3. Hence our most common technique of selection is also profoundly pessimistic. It assumes that some students can't be educated to a high standard, and thereby produces that outcome. The assumption that some students are likely to succeed in higher education when others are not in fact negates the value of good academic teaching and its potential to influence students.
4. It is also unfair and arbitrary. Statistical moderation and similar administrative techniques are almost infinitely manipulable behind their 'objective' screen; what is fair is what is designed to be fair in policy terms and involves quite arbitrary decisions. For example, assumptions about the comparative difficulty of HSC subjects are guesswork at best. Nor are examinations reliable within their own terms. Different examiners will often award the same work a different mark, and the same examiner can easily award different marks to the same work on different days.
5. It does not guarantee standards in higher education. One of the ironies of the present standards debate is that norm-referenced external examinations, which are essentially relativistic, are championed as the preserver of absolute traditional standards. The basic assumption here is really that competition is the source of excellence and the best motivator of student achievement. This assumption needs to be challenged. It does not apply to teaching and academic life, where we reject the free-market argument that

the abolition of tenure and the institution of competition for grants (and in George Fane's version of the argument, competition for salaries) is necessary in order to provide incentives for good quality work. It does not apply to special entry mature age students, who often out-perform other students selected on the normal competitive basis. Why then should it apply to HSC students aged between 16 and 18? The competitive ethos assumes that the learner is a passive object who needs to be compelled into motion rather than being motivated from within. Reliance on competition produces high achievement by a minority while the rest fall by the wayside. It is incompatible with the goal of excellence by all, which is the best guarantee of standards and which raises the 'floor' of achievement, propelling the high achievers still higher.

Reliance on competitive selection methods reduces the educational standards of higher education entrants quite specifically by narrowing the school curriculum only to what is to be examined and encouraging rote learning of content which is quickly memorised and easily forgotten. It does not encourage creativity or the ability to solve problems, for example, and is a poor preparation for self-directed learning in higher education. As Matthew Arnold commented last century: "It is found possible by ingenious preparation, to get children through the revised code examinations in reading, writing and ciphering without their really knowing how to read, write and cipher".⁵

6. Finally, our methods of selection distort the institutional structure of provision. As students are admitted to higher education on the basis of their position in a rank order, rather than their capacity and desire to do the work required, the patterning of institutions tends to be in a hierarchy of status rather than a functional division of labour. Thus the highest scoring students enter university, the middle scoring students tend to enter the CAEs and low scoring students tend to enter the TAFE institutions. CAEs are relegated to an inferior social function although this function bears no necessary relation to the quality of the teaching or of the courses.

4. Public and private schooling

The strongest defenders of a social structure are usually those who benefit from it to the greatest extent. Families from certain social groups are best placed to exploit the competitive selection

system, for economic reasons (income and occupational background), cultural reasons (language, home cultural environment) and historical reasons (such as a history of family participation in higher education).

In the face of the competitive selection system these advantages instil a relative confidence in the student children from such families, and the pattern of success is reproduced down the generations.

Disproportionately, these students are enrolled in private schools, many of which specialise in preparation for higher education and market themselves accordingly. Even many of the Catholic schools, once the poor relations of both the elite independent schools and the small number of select public schools that provided education to the end of year 12, now present themselves to the middle social strata as a general avenue of upward social mobility. In the process they are enrolling a growing number of non-Catholics.

The increasing retention in the public schools and the recent reforms towards a more comprehensive public school system would, by themselves, provide the basis for greater participation in and more equal access to higher education. But these democratic developments are fatally undermined by the presence of a growing private school sector, fed by increasing government subsidy. Over 25 per cent of all Australian school students are now involved in private schooling and if present patterns continue the proportion will reach 40 per cent by the year 2000. The end product of this trend would be the reduction of the role of the public schools to welfare functions such as child-minding and the minimization of youth unemployment.

The exit of certain families from the public school system is a direct result of government funding policies. Economist Professor Ross Williams showed last year that in terms of the resources per student brought by private school fees, private education now costs less than one third as much to parents as it did at the end of the 1960s.⁶ Given that private schools are seen to confer certain advantages although these advantages are probably illusory, in that they relate largely to the socio-economic composition of the clientele of private schools rather than the process of education within these schools — it is understandable (albeit regrettable) that some parents seek to seize the apparent advantages for their children.

Between 1974-75 and 1982-83 Commonwealth expenditure on private schools in the states rose by 97.7 per cent while expenditure on public schools fell by 20.5 per cent. State Governments' expenditure on private schools rose by 125.9 per cent

while their expenditure on public schools rose by 25.7 per cent.⁷ The Commonwealth has introduced an eight year funding plan which will see subsidies to private schools rose by at least one third (a further \$300 million) by 1992.

Historically the private schools have always played a disproportionate role in higher education, particularly in the universities. In 1975, 69 per cent of all senior secondary students were enrolled in public schools, 13 per cent in the non-Catholic private schools and 18 per cent in Catholic private schools. But the survey by Anderson, Boven, Fensham and Powell in 1976 found that only 58 per cent of university students came from public schools, with 20 per cent from the non-Catholic private schools and 21 per cent from the Catholic schools. The proportions enrolled in the metropolitan colleges were 66 per cent (public), 13 per cent (non-Catholic private) and 21 per cent (Catholic).⁸

In 1982 Clive Williams' study found that while 15 per cent of Year 12 students were enrolled in non-Catholic private schools, 22 per cent of all university entrants came from these schools and 36 per cent of all entrants to the University of Melbourne. 53 per cent of that University's first year medical students came from the non-Catholic private schools and only 30 per cent were from public schools.⁹

Within the overall structure of Australian education there is a privileged sub-structure, almost a closed system circulating students from elite private schools to favoured university courses and through to graduation as elite professionals. Their children follow the same path after them. The elite (public) universities and the elite private schools have much in common; not least is their success so far in claiming autonomy as a defence against democratic reforms.

The question of public and private schooling cannot be reduced to abstract and utopian polemics about 'freedom of choice' in a society in which the economic capacity to exercise such choices is distributed unequally, and very unequally at that. The point is rather that in a dual system of schooling there is an inevitable conflict between the two sectors and it is impossible for the public school system to provide quality education and effective avenues to higher education for all while the role of the private schools in preparation for higher education and preparation for higher-paid work continues to grow.

As each middle class family leaves the public system, the presence of the remaining middle class parents is further undermined, the public schools become less and less socially comprehensive and if the trend continues, preparation for higher education must ultimately become a less

and less important function within them. The end result would be to significantly worsen the existing social inequalities in access to higher education.¹⁰

5. Reform Proposals

In the face of the severe structural barriers to more equal access, the following far-reaching reforms are proposed. They would need to be accompanied by the maintenance of free public higher education and increased funding of public schools, higher education places and student allowances.

1. The use of school-based assessment, incorporating judgements by teachers subject to system-wide consensus moderating procedures, in place of external examinations as the major mechanism of selection into higher education. Direct professional judge-

ments (subject to system-wide moderation) can be both more reliable and less socially and educationally prejudicial than norm-referenced external examinations.

2. The institution of large-scale quotas for higher education entrance, based on socio-economic factors. For example, all institutions could be required to admit 40 per cent of students from families earning less than average weekly earnings, which may not affect many CAEs, but would certainly change the pattern of entry to the most privileged universities. Such quotas must be large scale to be publicly credible, to visibly change the pattern of access, and to become established as a legitimate principle of selection.
3. Increased places to mature age students, selected on the basis of inter-

view. Expansion of special entry schemes for Aboriginal students.

4. Fifty per cent female quotas in the faculties and schools where women are markedly under-represented, such as engineering, the technologies and the applied sciences.
5. A one year general education year at the commencement of all higher education courses, with selection into the most competitive vocational courses such as medicine and law at the end of that year.
6. The creation of open entry into the private schools, with selection on the basis of ballot where necessary, and the incorporation of these schools into a comprehensive public education system. Schools that remain outside the public system should cease to receive public funds.

Notes

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* This paper was first presented as an address to the Annual General Meeting of the Federation of College Academics in Sydney on August 22, 1985.

Student selection and performance in the Faculty of Law, The University of Adelaide

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Introduction

The central purpose of this paper is to set out the results of research into the performance of entrants into the University of Adelaide Law School. The paper's underlying premise is that the selection of students should, to the greatest extent possible, be fair and equitable in the sense of resting upon objective academic criteria. This is particularly necessary in a faculty such as Law, entry into which is intensely competitive, with over 1000 first preference applicants competing for 120 places in 1986.

The problem of selection has, historically, passed through several stages. In the first instance selection was largely a matter of choosing between competing matriculants. Subsequently, it became primarily concerned with selecting between and within two competing categories, viz., matriculants and applicants having tertiary results. Most recently, the research undertaken into the performance of law students has both suggested and facilitated a move to selecting only from competing applicants having tertiary experience.

The paper concentrates upon a major research effort in 1984-85. Some research was undertaken, however, from 1981. It should be said that as a result of the general disinterest in these matters which existed until recently the work was undertaken by concerned persons within the law school who worked from individual student records and from records of the Law Selection Committee.* The research would undoubtedly have benefited from the computer and statistical resources which the present climate will, hopefully, generate for the future.

1. The selection of matriculant applicants

Entry into the Law School before 1967 was available to any person who had matriculated. The huge intake in 1966 gave rise to the imposition of a quota in 1967. The resulting process of selection to fill the quota was simplified, however, by the University's policy of accepting the aggregate matriculation mark as the academic basis for entry.

2. The selection of transfer applicants

During the 1970s the number of applicants who had undertaken some tertiary study, ranging from several subjects to a degree, typically referred to as transfer applicants, grew rapidly. This gave rise to two selection problems. First, these applicants had to be ranked vis-a-vis each other and, secondly, they had to be slotted into the given list of matriculants.

In the case of ranking it was not clear whether graduates, having obtained a degree in minimum time, should rank above non-graduates or whether they should rank below non-graduates who had a higher percentage of distinctions or credits.

In the case of slotting, the difficulty was that no evidentiary basis existed for comparing matriculant and transfer applicants. Decisions relied heavily upon unsubstantiated speculation.

In 1981 it was decided, therefore, to undertake research through which the statistical likelihood of success in the Law School of the various entrants could reasonably be predicted in order to establish fair and equitable selection criteria. This meant establishing an objective basis upon which to select those students who could be expected to perform best.

3. Matriculation results of matriculant and transfer applicants compared

The first attempt to compare matriculant and transfer entrants involved calculating the mean matriculation mark for six groups of Adelaide University first-year Arts and Economics students having one, two and three credits and no fails respectively. This embraced the majority of transfer applicants and provided a basis for comparing them with matriculant applicants in matriculation mark terms.

This work showed that entrants in their four first year subjects who obtained two credits and no fails had a mean matriculation mark which corresponded to the matriculation cut-off mark for Law and

were, therefore, on a par with the marginal matriculation entrant. Those with more credits had a higher mean matriculation mark. This work was taken to justify a 'half credits rule' whereby applicants having two or more credits and no fails were selected. The results were only a broad guide, however, particularly given a disparity between the mean matriculation mark for the respective groups in the faculties in question, and given the smaller numbers in some of the groups.

4. Law School performance of matriculant and transfer applicants compared

Subsequently, the performance of matriculant and transfer entrants in the Law School was compared in terms of percentages of distinctions, credits, passes and fails. This work, which covered entrants in 1981-83, appeared, again in broad terms, to support the half credits rule. In 1981 and 1982 the transfer entrants performed slightly better. But in 1983, with a reduced quota and a higher matriculation entry mark, the results of the matriculants were slightly better than those of the transfer entrants.

This comparison dealt only with first year results. It did not, therefore, take into consideration any advantage which transfer entrants might have had in their first year as a result of previous tertiary experience.

5. Law School performance of transfer entrants compared

In order to compare the performance of transfer entrants vis-a-vis each other they were broken into three groups. Most entrants had completed just one year at a tertiary level or were graduates. The third group consisted of entrants falling somewhere between the other two. This work indicated that the policy of ranking all transfer students, including graduates, according to the quality, not quantity, of their pre law tertiary results was justified.